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Footnotes: Safety in the Sanctuary + The Two Popes

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Footnotes¹

'Curated Resources for Ministers



Hey Friends,

Many church leaders are discussing their safety policies after the shooting at the [West Freeway Church of Christ](#). All churches have security policies (either spoken or unspoken) on a number of issues that relate to member safety. At White Station we have a robust risk management process in place for all volunteers who work with our children and students, in large part to protect them from predators and other forms of harm. That's one example. But most churches have locks on doors, security cameras, or parking lot attendants. Some larger churches have police who direct traffic and posted speed limits. And who hasn't had an inopportune visit from the fire marshal?

Today I'll cover some other aspects of safety in churches with Patrick Mead. Plus:

- Shane Claiborne
- *The Two Popes*
- and a Few More Footnotes.

Enjoy.



Footnotes Roundtable: Patrick Mead

Patrick is the Senior Minister for the Fourth Avenue Church of Christ in Franklin, Tennessee. He frequently contributes to [Wineskins](#).

BT:What policies does your church have in place in regards to armed safety/security?

PM: We have a safety team that consists of medical personnel and security personnel. They train together and are connected via nearly invisible ear buds. Some of the security personnel are armed. It is legal to carry in churches in TN and we do not ask for people to carry or disarm. Our officially armed personnel MUST keep their weapon concealed and we never speak about weapons among ourselves as we do not want to frighten or upset those who overhear us. Armed personnel are trained by [www.agapetactical.com](#) – all believers, and exceptionally highly trained professionals.

BT: As a preacher, have you explored guns/safety theologically (in teachings, writings, and sermons)?

PM: While guns were mentioned, they were not the focus. I have spoken to the issue of pacifism and self defense several times. We make a point of honoring pacifists as well as those who believe they can and should use force to protect the innocent. No political statements or arguments are allowed from the pulpit or in classrooms, neither from the speaker or the congregants.

BT: Some might say that having no guns in church is a safer option than having many guns.

PM: I am a neuroscientist who specializes in combat fear/recovery, PTSD, and the neurobiology of fear. I lecture at the FBI National Academy, Homeland Security, state police agencies, etc. every year. I live for data and the data does not support disarming for safety's sake. The FBI estimates citizens stop over 1 million crimes a year by lawfully using weapons. Criminals love gun free zones. I wish it were otherwise.

BT: I'm curious about this issue at a congregational level. Some members feel safer knowing there are trained/armed people around them. Others might not. If you've experienced this, what strategies do you suggest for finding a path to unity here?

PM: I stress the impossibility of ensuring that no one has a weapon in church. We cannot run TSA-like security lines at every entrance. Since this is the world in which we live, we are prepared and pray that we never need that preparation. We do not speak of guns and anyone who reveals that they are carrying are asked to disarm or conceal and never reveal it again.

BT: While it might provide safety in the short term, some argue that a reliance on armed security endorses a system of violence, supports gun companies, and bolsters the NRA in ways that might be counterproductive to the larger witness of peacemaking. How might you respond to such criticisms?

PM: They have a philosophical/political/theological set of ideas that they may have arrived at via deep thought and study...or they might have leaped to them via fear. That is true for those who carry, too. I take the CS Lewis view that this is not yet heaven, so there are some terrible realities which we must accept and act accordingly.

BT: If a group of elders were exploring this issue, what are three issues/questions you would put forward to them as they move forward?

PM: Have you checked with your insurance and lawyer to make sure such a team is legal and does not expose the church to liability suits? Are you willing to pay the costs for training? What level of training is acceptable for someone to be designated as a member of an armed safety team?



Shane Claiborne (returns?)

Sometime in the mid-2000's I piled into the upstairs of Memphis's beloved Caritas Village in Binghampton. I remember it being below 20 degrees outside, while it was much warmer as 200+ of us sat on top of each other in that upper room, with the iconic I AM A MAN banner hanging just behind us. Claiborne made a joke about how he loved to speak in gatherings that would offend fire marshalls.

Claiborne had a significant appeal at that time, as we considered the global carnage wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Further, I was in a life stage where I was studying for ministry, but was really attracted to the ministry of discipleship, simplicity, and hospitality that Claiborne advocated.

Claiborne has reclaimed a bit of the spotlight with his newest book [Beating Guns](#). *The Washington Post* [caught up with him recently](#).

Claiborne walks an interesting path. One could take his message as firmly political and place him on the left of the political spectrum. Yet one can also see him differently, not as a spot on the political spectrum, but as a rejection of it. His message of simplicity and living below one's means isn't exactly a talking point for either major political party right now. And both of those parties presently offer economic solutions based on spending someone else's money, not on giving of one's own. That night, Claiborne said: "God doesn't judge you by how much you give, but by how much you keep."



The Two Popes: A Review

Christian movies have deservedly received some pretty brutal criticism. While Christian musical artists have enjoyed crossover appeal, Christian cinema has struggled. In fact, I'm now questioning my use of the term "cinema." There is something about Christian movies that just doesn't work. It might be that they try too hard to mimic mainstream films or that [they have basic integrity issues](#). We could blame the actors, but let's be fair: Kirk Cameron was fantastic as Mike Seaver on *Growing Pains*. I have a hard time believing he forgot how to act when he did *Left Behind* (Rotten Tomatoes 16%).

This all leads me to ask why we cannot make more movies like [The Two Popes](#). It tells the story of Pope Benedict and Jorge Borgoglio, who later became Pope Francis. The two were frenemies to some degree, with the more traditional Benedict wanting to double down on historic commitments of the Church, while Borgoglio insisted on changes that would meet global realities, such as an unfair economic system, declining religiosity, and a global climate crisis.

The movie works in so many ways, much in part to its intriguing story line, and also because Anthony Hopkins masterfully captures the nuances of Pope Benedict's tension, as he balances his responsibility both to his constituency while trying to be faithful to God's calling. And that tension is exactly why every minister and church leader should watch *The Two Popes*. It tells the story that so many of us feel each day. Benedict and Francis differ on some topics, but they are both stubborn men who are wholly devoted to their calling. They desire similar outcomes, but they simply disagree on the how to achieve them. In one scene, the two have a tense theological conversation on how the Church should relate to matters of the language of the Mass, same-sex marriage, increased secularism, and priestly celibacy. Borgoglio makes his case for relevancy; Benedict makes his case for identity. Borgoglio claims the culture has been oppressed by harmful systems; Benedict insists that moral relativism has played a role as well.

During this conversation, you will inevitably align with one of the Popes. I bet you'll find the other compelling as well. I did. The tension they inhabit is one that I feel strongly, and that I suspect finds a place in your heart and your ministry: identity/relevancy; systems/individual responsibility; loving God/ loving neighbor; high view of culture/high view of Scripture. The movie does a masterful job in helping audiences get inside the tension. It also increased my appreciation for leaders who negotiate these tensions from such a lonely place.

I strongly recommend *The Two Popes*.



A Few More Footnotes

1. My dad used to tell my sister and I about a vision he had for storefront in South Lorain that would serve the poor in the name of Jesus. *The Christian Chronicle* [came and reported on that ministry](#), now in its thirteenth year.
2. Church security [tips from Aubrey Malphurs](#).
3. I'm happy to see that *Just Mercy* has been made into a movie (as of this writing, it's sitting at a respectable 81 on [Rotten Tomatoes](#)). Stevenson tells more about his story here. I've heard appreciative reviews for the [National Memorial for Peace and Justice](#) that he opened last year in Montgomery.
4. Many were surprised to wake up a few weeks ago and see that President Trump would no longer be reading...*Christianity Today*. Obviously, the conservative periodical is not something most of us would expect to be featured on the coffee table of the Oval Office. This came after Mark Galli editorialized that Christians should stop supporting Trump--[and suggested that Trump should be removed from office](#). Next, the Subscriber-in-Chief [fired back](#) by calling CT "far left." The previous issue of CT asked the question of whether churches and Christian organizations should stop desiring tax exempt status, and thereby giving up some of their religious freedoms in exchange. So, not exactly *The Village Voice*. Soon after Trump tweeted about his displeasure, [2,000 subscribers canceled Christianity Today](#). CT followed that up by saying that the recent events also brought 5,000 new subscribers.
5. John Fea says ["Wayne Grudem Lives in a Different Moral Universe than I Do."](#)
6. [Should children sit through big church?](#)



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